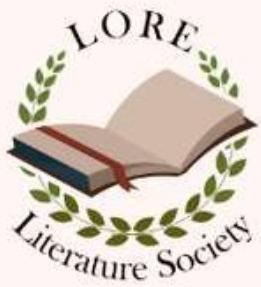


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LORE

• anthology •



LORE Anthology

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Melbourne, Victoria

Australia

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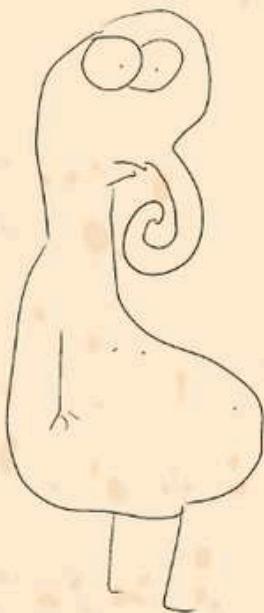
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LORE Anthology is an initiative of RMIT LORE Literature Society. The authors retain the rights to their story. If they submit a story that has been published in this anthology to another publication, it must then be stated that it was first published here. All credit goes to the LORE Anthology 2024 team.

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Publisher's note:

Well, that was an experience. Organising an anthology mid-to-late semester was quite the undertaking. This has been a very experimental process for a lot of us; namely, myself. This is my first attempt at stepping foot into the world of publishing, and I'm very happy to see it pay off.

Taking on a project of this magnitude wasn't possible without a team of hardworking volunteers. Thank you to the editing and design teams for your contributions and hard work. Also, thank you and congratulations to the authors who made it into the anthology. Unfortunately, we couldn't include all the submissions, but I guess that's how it goes for the writing world. Please, don't get discouraged. Keep writing and don't stop!

In terms of LORE, we had an eventful year. In April, our executive and the April writing competition entrants attended Melbourne Writers Festival. Our April 'Book of the Month' was *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* by Toshikazu Kawaguchi, who was at the festival, and we had the privilege of meeting him and having our books signed. Mine currently sits on my shelf, with my name written in Japanese above Kawaguchi's signature. Pretty cool, eh?

That month, we also had a BBQ with our friends at the Astronomy Society, who we met at the Clubs Fest. There was a big turnout, and the event was a success.

We attended both Clubs fest and Campus Fest, receiving more memberships than I imagined we would ever receive, and since the club's inception earlier this year, our social media has boomed with visitors and views, which was very encouraging to see.

Other than our casual book club and writing club meet-ups, we also had a mixer with a few of the other writing and publishing societies in RMIT. It was a great chance to make new friends with people who had overlapping interests.

I feel this year has been very kind to LORE, as we've seen nothing but success after success. Here's hoping next year will be the same.

I restarted this society after its hiatus because I wanted to do three things: Start a writing club, host social events, and publish an anthology. I not only wanted a recreational club, but a platform for students to build their portfolios. I'm happy to report that all of these things have been achieved, and this anthology is evidence of that.

Most of the anthology entries are winners from competitions we hosted throughout the year, and for some, this is their first 'Author' badge. To our authors who are reading this, congratulations again, and I hope this identity serves you well.

And for the casual reader, I hope you enjoy.

- Patrick.

A Word from

We did it! Directing the layout design for LORE's anthology (and completing it within a month) was a challenge, but it was one I took on gladly. Designing an anthology is familiar waters for me, however, I would still like to thank my fellow design team for navigating it with me!

Aside from this project, I also joined LORE this year as an executive member, which has been a welcoming learning experience. Being part of this club gave me the opportunity to meet many amazing and talented people who shared my love for books and stories, and it was a delight. The revival of LORE is certainly looking to be promising, and I'm excited to grow alongside it in the future!

- Dora

the Designers

I joined the literature society at the start of my degree, while the club was under a different name. This year, I helped the club evolve and grow with the rest of the executive team. LORE let me connect with many people over a shared interest of reading and writing - something especially difficult with lockdown preventing us from interacting in-person.

Considering the club went inactive for a time after, it has been so exciting to see it revived through the new executive committee and anthology project. Though I'm graduating this year, it's exciting to know that this club will continue through the work of so many others. I am looking forward to seeing where it goes next!

- Ciel

The Cocoon

Parth Purohit

She walked the world,
with her six legs.

Yet she walked one step too few,
to make her cocoon.

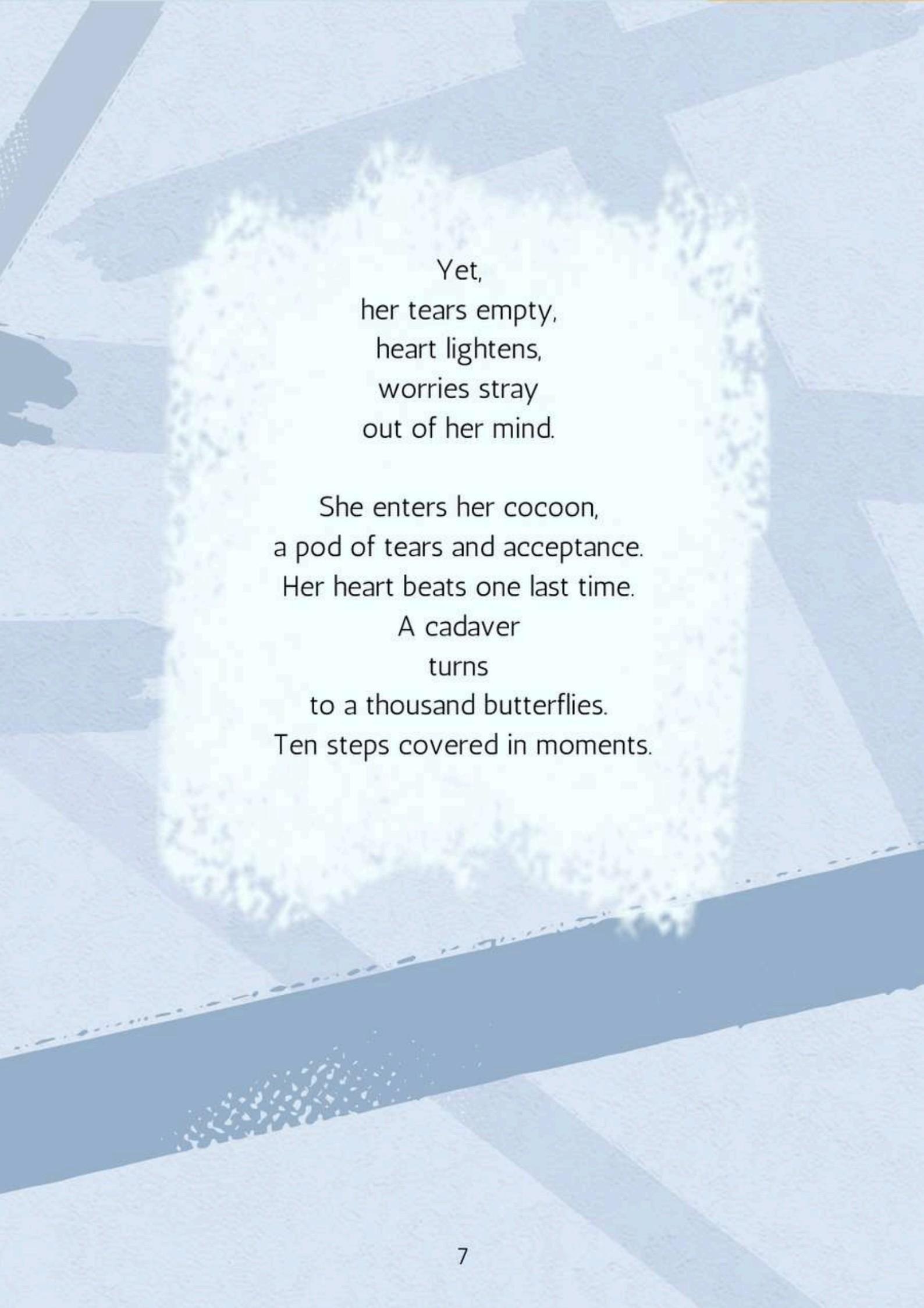
She lies still now,
a caterpillar to be picked
by the carrion bird,
Who takes all.

She strains
two arms,
two legs,
two eyes,
lying wide
awake.

She's surrounded,
clutched by her beloved.

They weep.

She weeps more.
Leaving her promises
Unfinished.



Yet,
her tears empty,
heart lightens,
worries stray
out of her mind.

She enters her cocoon,
a pod of tears and acceptance.
Her heart beats one last time.
A cadaver
turns
to a thousand butterflies.
Ten steps covered in moments.

Mirrored Junctures

Roopkotha Chakrabarti



A row for millions to follow, a million to flow.

Wandering amidst the wallows of wanderlust,
A lone child shall come upon and ask,
'Will you end up being with that fine fellow?'
Curiosity, a curse that can kill, I hear the cello.

'I doubt I'd be able to grow old ...' I told the
Child, void of any known emotions.
I touch the glass, frozen in fragments; I weep
As tears stream down, the reflection of my own.



A journey a thousand miles away; I walked.
A history worth a thousand lines; I stayed.

The child holds on to the pieces of the past, I fall down,
Fearful of the future that is forever fast.
A crooked smile will come upon the frightful glass, which of us is
Trapped ... are we of the same class?

'Child, why must you stay attached to these ropes?' I'll ask,
Awaiting a lost voice to be filled, be devoid.
A blank gaze, eyes glare down my throat, the child says,
'Child, why are you not letting go?'





We stare, we stare, we stare, we stare, we stare,
we stare, we stare, we stare, we stare, we stare ...

‘Are we one in the same, a breed like none other?’ I ponder,
Listlessly, as we float down this white limbo.

‘Are you who I’m meant to be? A forgotten memory?’
I stare, I gaze, I glare; you watch, you wait, you stare.

A lonely child; traversing a path of golden stones.

‘What is it to be the same?’: a childish question.

‘What does a memory matter?’: defiant nature.

A lonely child; a curse waiting to be overturned.

A thousand miles to walk one way; your journey.

A thousand lines to stay for one; your history.

I laugh, a child’s song is sung; terrified.

You smile, an adult’s dream; resigned.

A mask I wore, when ‘once upon a time’ mattered,

I look into the window, your gaze grows cold.

Wandering amidst the wallows of wanderlust,
I find a lone child, agape at the emptiness that follows.

‘Will you end up being with that fine fellow?’

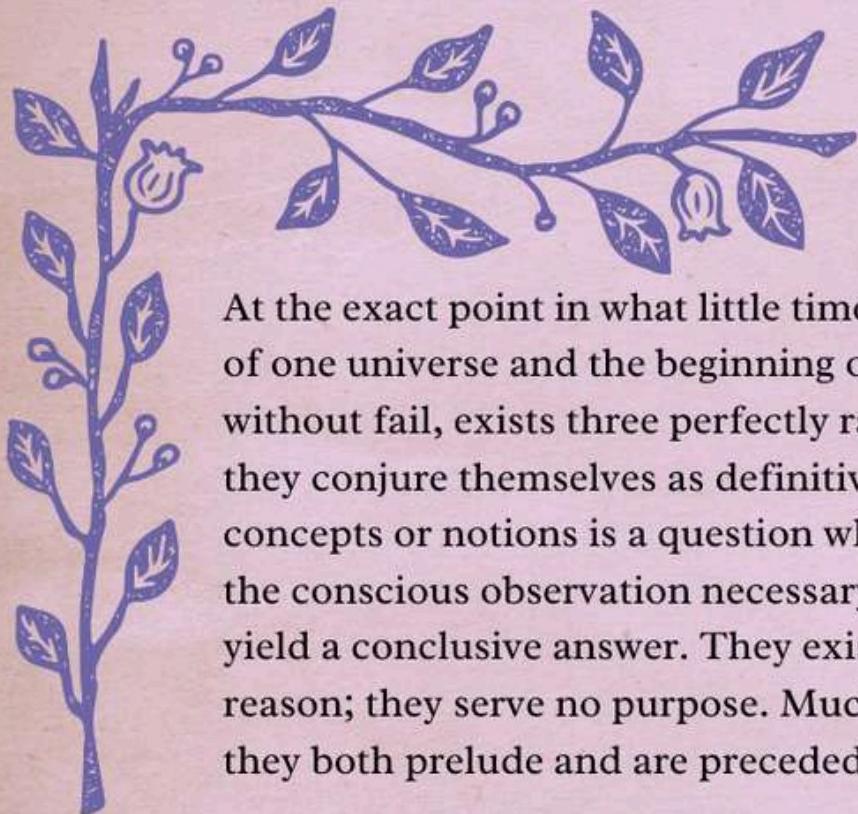
Curiosity, a curse that can kill, I play the cello.

A row for millions to flow, a million to follow.



A Bonsai Tree, A Chessboard, And A Characteristically Unphased Alchemist

Yasmin Fathi

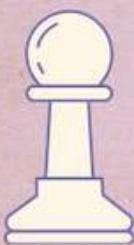


At the exact point in what little time is left between the end of one universe and the beginning of another, there always, without fail, exists three perfectly random things. Whether they conjure themselves as definitive items or simply as concepts or notions is a question which may never receive the conscious observation necessary to be uttered, let alone yield a conclusive answer. They exist with no rhyme nor reason; they serve no purpose. Much like the worlds which they both prelude and are preceded by, they simply are.

A cat's whisker, the lens from a pair of +0.75 prescription glasses, an entire industrial heater. A single AirPod, a moon, a very confused mongoose. The innersole of an orthopaedic slipper, a blade of grass, an electron. A flake of gold, a plain white mug, a piece of fuzz from a carpet equally parts blue and purple. Or, in this instance, a bonsai tree, a chessboard and a surprisingly, yet not uncharacteristically, unphased alchemist.

The alchemist, existing surrounded not by nothing, but rather an unsettling lack of something, turned to the two objects she had to keep her company. A simple bonsai tree, with slightly wilted leaves which brushed upon its miniature trunk, and a chessboard, worn yet timeless, complete with 32 intricately carved pieces. She sensed that they would not only keep her company, but also her sanity. She understood, whether through a form of divine intervention or simply as all ideas come, that herself and the two objects were at the resolution of something great. At a point of transformation, with nothing else to pass what the alchemist came to understand as a time between times, she resolved to undertake one last experiment. One last transformation. One last creation. One last union. It did not come to her immediately, her decision, but when it did, she knew it was the one. How she thought she would do it, how she attempted to do it, and why she felt compelled to do it, are all facts which are lost to time. However, one thing is abundantly clear; she did not succeed.





The alchemist selected a chess piece at random. Her hand first brushed a knight, then a pawn. Not wanting to interfere with what fate might have in store, she chose the knight. For as long as time permitted, she did nothing but channel everything towards the small tree, manifesting what she envisioned as a grand transformation. Perhaps this was where her failure began; she neglected the fact that one cannot hope to wield the power of everything in the presence of nothing. Time, space and, perhaps, even meaning gradually begun to conjure around her as the universe built itself. Yet, to the alchemist's dismay, the tree remained adamantly unchanged.

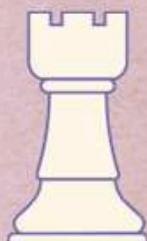
What became of the alchemist is unknown. She was there and then she was not. What transpired between these two events remains a mystery. Maybe she gave up and moved on; she had an entirely new world to explore after all. Maybe she went too far in her efforts, overexerted herself and suffered the devastating consequences. Or maybe she simply had enough.

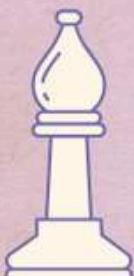
Regardless, the outcome remains the same. The tree was left to its own devices.

Within its pith, its heart, its bole and its sap, the tree held a miraculous secret. While its physical transformation had failed, the tree instead gained something far more valuable: Knowledge.

Pulsing through its roots existed an intricate, unparalleled understanding of the game of chess. Its tiny leaves mirrored patterns of thoughts even the greatest chess player would only ever catch glimpses of. Incredibly, the bonsai tree, miniature even for its breed, had become a sentient being bound by neither space nor time, holding the secrets of the universe within its delicate branches.

It was fate that guided the bonsai tree to a small planet. Even in its infancy, the planet was lush with the croppings of what would one day become a grand landscape. Suitably, the planet was named Earth (/UHRth/), a word which doubled as a descriptor for its soil. A literal homage to the planet's roots, to its life source. Among what would flourish into expansive mountains and ancient forests, the bonsai tree found the perfect stage to conduct a chess game like no other. A single move alone would take millennia to execute, yet amidst the ebb and flow of time the smallest mountains transformed themselves into knights and the largest trees began to resemble pawns, the deepest caves became bishops while the sharpest cliffs became rooks. Beaches and deserts on opposite ends of the planet became the game's queens, and the startlingly similar dunes its kings. On the surface, no visible change had occurred. The planet appeared untouched and, to even the most trained eye, unchanged. Nonetheless, after millions of years of preparation the board was set.





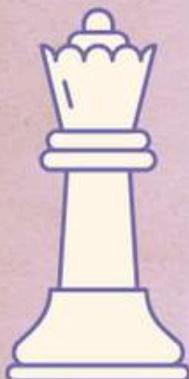
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There are only two buses which pass by the adjacent stops enclosing Waterdale Road, which is ironic considering the bus depot itself can be seen from either stop. That being said, Joseph considers looking to the depot as cheating. The buses which pass these stops have the potential for nine ads between them, though typically there are repeats depending on the amount of money each patron is willing to contribute. Hasbro and Di Bonaventura Pictures' *'Transformers: Age of Extinction'* gave Dysons enough money to reward themselves two buses, the left side of the only 550 and both sides of one of the three 551s. While Joseph had already seen them both, he had neglected to photograph the right side of the 551. The two sides together work to create a full image of an injured, but still standing, Optimus Prime alongside the slogan: 'THIS IS NOT WAR, IT'S EXTINCTION'. He didn't need pictures of both sides, as anybody who knew him would know that he would have seen and studied both sides extensively. But nonetheless, he was a sucker for a good memento.

e4 to e5; In the depths of a looming forest, a figure is overcome by a sense of urgency. Its leaves eliminate their need for the sun's rays and, struck by desire, find themselves filled with new purpose. Its leaves stretch forward in the name of its newfound craving, its thick trunk groaning as it hulks its colossal frame, heaving as it carefully inches forward.

Its progress is slow but constant, fuelled not by an unforeseen authority, but rather something the figure comes to recognise as an old friend. An inherent instinct. A guardian. Its ambition has no grounds yet it never falters. The figure reaches its goal with no reward, lest for the completely unfounded feeling that it has somehow played a part in a truth far greater than itself.

Purple, black, and orange ribbon formed a tapestry of loops and bows across Mindy's walls. What little space remained was obscured by a roll of butcher's paper. The paper spanned across three of the four walls, adorned with shaky block letters and intricate drawings. It created the feeling that no matter where one stood, the likeness of Frankie Stein, Clawdeen Wolf and Draculaura—sketched in a manner that would be entirely unimpressive, if not for the fact that it was by a child—would be smiling down upon them. The child in question was celebrating her 10th birthday and sat, excitedly picking at the skin between her thumb and her nail, as guests began to pour in. Mindy liked that for one day of the year she didn't have friends. She had guests. It made her feel mature.



d4 to c6; In a world so high above what most would consider ‘the world’, that those down below seldom cast a thought its way, something happened. There are better descriptors to be used than merely ‘something’, but in a place so desolate, anything at all seems a miraculous feat. The shape was usually so expansive, so powerful, its observers considered it a shadow, a trick of the light. Yet today the shape was there. It was compelled by a single goal and felt its energy would be wasted if it were to be dedicated to anything else. For the first time in what would one day become a short time for the shape, it looked beyond its claustrophobic horizon and found something more. It moved. It did not move quickly, but as years passed, they no longer felt like lifetimes, and as every lifetime passed, the shape discovered a new meaning for the word.

Today, more than ever, we’re aware that our actions can benefit the next generation. So, I believe it’s important to choose organic... With milk sourced fresh, from our own organic farms. Biostime SN-2 BIO PLUS Premium Organic Toddler Milk Drink combines the power of science with the power of nature, because what we give them today can have a big impact on their tomorrow. Choose the next generation of organic. Choose Biostime.

g2 to c2; A shard of rock flakes itself off a cliffside. It will be the first of many.

*

Clenched tightly in the boy's fist is an ice cream. The cone, under (what only a cone would consider) an immense amount of pressure, remains miraculously intact. The ice cream itself is vanilla flavoured. The boy wanted rainbow. Vanilla wasn't a bad flavour or anything, but it was certainly not his favourite. Nonetheless, ice cream is ice cream.

*

e1 to d2; Sandstorm.

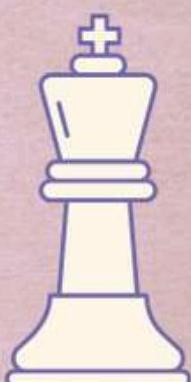
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The woman finishes her painting. For anybody else, this would be a moment of pride, but for the woman this moment marks the exact point in time which she must relinquish all rights to her artwork. It's of a couple sitting under a beautifully white rotunda, which was not there on the day. The two are smiling. There is a grey area between a smile so wide that every wrinkle shows and a smile so small that it is seldom visible, and that's where the couple operates. They appear romantic, but respectfully so. They appear in love, but not so much that it becomes unattractive, that it is no longer relatable. The painting will not dry for another few days.

Its postal box sits waiting patiently alongside a simple bronze frame. Another painting will come and go, and another after that. But it doesn't make the moment hurt any less.

*

b5 to c4; Checkmate.



Constitution of The Milky Way Uncommonwealth

MJ



[Abridged and Translated to Galactic Basic, otherwise known as "English"]

Unauthorised viewing of this Constitution will result in a punishment of at least one millennium of detention in Saxum Inter Planetae Bay.

Preamble

We, the aristocracy of these undemocratic, unequal, inequitable, tyrannical systems, do ordain this Constitution to bring about an order that favours our divine right to plunder, pillage and pretentiously pester the peasantry of these most unsavoury, uninteresting systems.

And whereas the systems of Proxima Centari, Privateers Bazaar [sponsored by Ultralite Defence™], CorruptoCorp™ System 838 and the Serf-ers Sea have resolved to unite under a single, completely dissolvable, allegedly, Galactic Uncommonwealth under the watchful eye of the Divine See for Profitable Affairs.

We resolve to finally put an end to the annoying antics of the cretinous commoners below us and thus bestow ourselves these positions of power, violence and coercion, as well as make the uneducated masses believe that this new order is poised to create some ethereal notion of freedom in their tiny, underdeveloped minds, while also keeping those who fund and support us in a place of supreme, unchecked power.

Part I: General Provisions

Article 1: Legislative Power

Legislative power of the Galactic Uncommonwealth of the Milky Way shall be vested in a 'parliament', which shall consist of the Supreme Shareholder of the Divine See for Profitable Affairs, the House of Misrepresentation and Senate of Discord, which is hereafter referred to as the Galactic Parliament.

Article 2: The Puppet Governor

A Puppet Governor, appointed by the Supreme Shareholder of the Divine See for Profitable Affairs, shall be His Most Opulent Majesty's representative in the Uncommonwealth, subject to no checks in power, provided that His Holliness happily allows whatever horrid, heinous acts the Puppet Governor wishes to undertake.

Article 3: Salary of the Puppet Governor

There shall be a salary payable out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Uncommonwealth for the Puppet Governor, which, until the Galactic Parliament otherwise provides, shall be [Please fill out a PG-42 form, or purchase the InfoCo Government Information Package to view this information].

The salary of the Puppet Governor shall not be altered during his continuance in office, unless there is some form of political strife, or His Excellency simply feels entitled to extra public funds.

Part II: The Galactic Parliament

Article 4: Sessions to be Held Periodically

There shall be a session of the Galactic Parliament no more than once in every decade, so that we may pretend to represent the masses, covertly siphoning away their will to revolt.

Article 5: House of Misrepresentation

The House of Misrepresentation shall be composed of members indirectly chosen by the people of the Commonwealth. The number of such members shall be, as nearly as practicable, twice the number of the senators.

Article 6: Senate of Discord

The Senate of Discord shall be composed of members of the populous attempting to seize some sort of relevancy in their systems, by populistically pandering to corporately manufactured issues of their constituency, only to then sit on their bums and have a parliamentary attendance record that manages to rival an average citizen's secondary school math class attendance.

Part III: Executive Power

Article 7: Executive Power

The executive power of the Commonwealth is vested in the Supreme Shareholder, and is exercisable by the Puppet Governor as His Most Opulent Majesty's representative, and extends to the execution and maintenance of this Constitution and of the laws of the Commonwealth. This shall be subject to the whims of all the corporations that precariously uphold this farse of a sovereignty.



Article 8: Automation of Executive Power

For the purposes of this Uncommonwealth, all executive power shall be exercised by a set of artificial intelligences *ex officio* holding seats within both houses of the Galactic Parliament. This automated Galactic Executive Council shall advise the Puppet Governor in the government of the Uncommonwealth. The Puppet Governor is at his discretion to partly or completely ignore the advice of the council.

Article 9: Prerogative to Act Corruptly

To ensure inefficient bureaucratic government, department secretaries, appointed by members of the Automatic Galactic Executive Council, shall, wherever practicable:

- act incompetently in a manner that prevents expedient delivery of vital services;
- commit acts that effectively defraud or dishonestly destroy confidence in government; and
- show absolutely no respect to the laws that govern them insofar, as it does not legally become treason.

Part IV: Powers of the Galactic Parliament

Article 10: Legislative Powers

The Galactic Parliament shall have the power to make laws that seemingly apply equally to all species of the Uncommonwealth, that in reality creates systems of oppression to the benefit or profit of corporate donors and wealthy aristocrats, which will be euphemistically called 'legislation'.

Article 11: Disallowance by the Supreme Shareholder

Whereby the Supreme Shareholder of the Divine See for Profitable Affairs realises that actual progress is being made that shifts the balance of power from lords of backwater fiefdoms and industrialists of prominent trade centres to the filthy masses, His Most Opulent Majesty may choose to disallow legislation.



Part V: The “Judicature”

Article 12: Judicial Power and Courts

To quote his Lordship, Delaval Clotworthy John Christopher Whyte-Melville Littleton, Baron of Lactalis:

'In order to properly encapsulate the true breadth and width of justice and judicial power, we must first turn to the great alien Nestlice, philosopher Scelerisque Lacimus, who thought of judicial power akin to a droning song that annoys and confuses everyone within earshot. Its authority quietly yells at all, underneath threats to affix their digits or equivalent appendages to the bounds of the pillory. Thus, we must affix the will of subjects of these fine colonies to the gibbets of the law. The court must then have signal power to declare and define all words unclear, all phrases unheard and all offences uncommitted. In essence, we follow the will and trust of our great Supreme Shareholder, in his infinite wisdom for the morality and governance of us plebian servants. We ... are useless.'

Part VI: Rights and Privileges

Article 13: Private Rights of Citizenry

All customers shall enjoy such rights as to His Most Opulent Majesty shall seem requisite. This shall ensure that all citizens are equally oppressed and left scrambling for their basic needs.

Article 14: The Right to Infight

All customers shall also enjoy their right to constantly bicker, infight and brawl to the chagrin of their corporation-mandated intelligence officers.

Article 15: Corporate and Aristocratic Rights

All corporations and aristocrats of the Uncommonwealth shall enjoy the right to discriminate, demoralise, disenfranchise and destructively diminish the self-esteem of all those indebted to them. This extends to measures calculated to remove all power and basic necessities from the hands of 'charitable actors'.

This excerpt continues for another 50 pages. The Department of Misinformation has condensed this for all authorized readers of this constitution.



Postamble

This Constitution has been formulated to ensure that all authorised readers are capable of properly oppressing the lower classes of their respective systems. Any seemingly fair or just articles are not intended to be read literally and must be read with the context that we, the indignant and stubborn pillars of capital, wish to bureaucratically suppress and stifle the expression of all living and unliving things within the Uncommwealth. It should also be noted that any attempts to educate the masses on the actual meaning of this Constitution may result in being ejected into the far reaches of space, or spaghettification in the black hole at the centre of the Milky Way. All complaints or grievances shall be addressed to 42 Boötes Void, Milky Way.

To prevent any incidents like the Democratic Revolution of the 4th millennium, please ensure that the Galactic Military sufficiently cracks down on any, and all, revolts swiftly and that the Department of Misinformation is sufficiently manufacturing controlled opposition in popular media and news sources, as well as clandestinely controlling all means of social cohesion.



Alien Story

Yasmin Fathi

On the 23rd of February 1455, at the tail end of a particularly cold winter, two men both by the name Johann set out to translate, print and publish over 180 copies of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament into Latin. Despite the catalysing role this simple act played in altering the course of human history, only around 49 copies survive today, less than half of which are complete. This, my father argues, by definition, makes my middle school diary, containing a series of incomplete and borderline illegible entries even I have trouble conclusively dating rarer than the Gutenberg Bible. I know there's a lesson somewhere in that claim, multiple even, yet I never quite knew which one he was trying to convey. The importance of subjectivity is the obvious pick. The single copy of my diary is objectively rarer, yet the Bible's subjective relevance tips the scale to an overwhelming degree. But there's also the mystery of the future. Maybe one day my middle school diary will be more relevant and rarer than the Gutenberg Bible, or maybe my father was just ahead of the curve.

*

There is no better feeling than seeing the intrigue on another's face upon revealing one is an archaeologist. It's an impressive job, conjuring images of gaudy relics and cursed tombs. Yet archaeology is an occupation best practised on a purely aesthetic level. The impressed gazes, the wide eyes clouded by entirely fictitious scenes of undated ancient monuments, the smiles of wonder,

all inspired by the simple word “archaeologist”. They are by far the best parts, really the only good parts, of the job. There is absolutely nothing impressive or to be envied about spending mornings breathing in dust so old it predates the word itself, nor of afternoons crouched into corners and crevices carefully dusting away, only to reveal more, even older dust and shockingly, nothing of note. This is the position Screen currently finds herself in. When she was offered the opportunity to not only visit a relatively untouched dig site, but to also go to an unoccupied planet, she jumped on the opportunity silently hoping it would not be more of the same. She was dearly mistaken. As it would turn out, while much differs between the old and new planets, the excruciatingly boring approach one must take in excavating old structures to ensure nothing is lost is one thing that does not change. Screen resigns herself to continue dusting away for at least the next hour.

While not from an ‘alien’ planet, enough differs between the humans of today and those of the old planets that they are generally approached as so. With savage bloody histories and little in the way of progression for the first few million years, it is often easier to treat them as if they were a different species altogether. They are, of course, not. This one fatal flaw is what drives much investigation into their cultures and their customs. Humanity today is desperate to find something, anything, to justify their ancestors. They were not blindly evil. Screen understands this. They had autonomy, empathy, sympathy. They cried, laughed, lived, and died for one another, yet their capacity and willingness to openly and knowingly do wrong is nonetheless a defining

trait. There is no genetic difference between humans today and humans from 300 years ago — a fact that most either do not believe or uncomfortably ignore. Screen, the name given to her at the unfortunate timing between her birth and a “unique” baby naming trend the namesake of an old human technology, has a personal stake in this ordeal.

The planet she finds herself on happens to be the planet much of her species’ less savoury history took place upon. The structure she is currently in is relevant to exactly none of this history. The crevice she nestled herself in, she concluded a few hours ago, belonged to a young girl. She deduced this, primarily, from the size and colour of the furniture that was much too small for any adult to squeeze into, and beneath the dust, a surprisingly bright shade of pink (a colour once strongly associated with femininity). Bringing back a piece of this furniture would’ve been Screen’s job adequately done but, frankly, the architectural trends of low budget Earth furniture is not exactly an area which inspires much awe. Screen lifts herself, taking a moment to adjust after having bent knees for the better part of half a day (only around six hours on Earth, God knows how they got anything done). There’s not an awful lot riding on this job but she wants to do well to leave the planet on a satisfying note, to have a job well done. On nothing more than a whim, a last-minute ditch to gain something of substance out of the expedition — if only a story to tell — Screen moves to lurch open the room’s only window, figuring if she were the window itself, she would be awfully disgruntled at her lack of use over the last few hundred years.

The window understandably groans at Screen's efforts but slides at a surprisingly steady pace before stopping suddenly with a soft thud, as if blocked. She cranes her neck to investigate and to her astonishment discovers a small rectangular form. Of course, she is familiar with books. Text in this form was the most popular medium of recording and relaying information for the vast majority of human history, but they were generally stored in a stacking fashion along walls or upon flat surfaces, not wedged between windowsills. Most old books, nowadays, are available via blood transmission: A simple self-administered injection into the bloodstream of the desired text and it is instantly visible to view in the mind's eye. Much more convenient, as it not only transcends language thanks to automatic neural calibration, but also allows those who were previously unable to read, for whatever reason, to comprehend the text with perfect clarity. Great pains were taken to ensure every known text, no matter how small, would be available. At one point there was even a self-submission drive if one felt a certain piece of text, perhaps a personal journal or particularly delicious breakfast menu, ought to be immortalised. Books in their carbon form are entirely obsolete. A sort of oddity enjoyed by some as home décor.

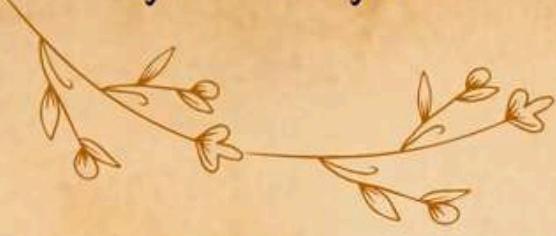
Screen picks up the book. It's a similar shade of pink to the rest of the room. Its papers shuffle under her fingers. It could be anything: Fiction, non-fiction, academic, recreational... She groans internally, realising it will now fall upon her to identify the title and author of the book as it seems to have no indicator of identity on its outside as customary of an item of its kind. Carefully, she lifts its hard

shell. Paper can become quite fragile over time and she does not want to make her job for the next few days more difficult by unintentionally destroying part of the text. It is halfway through this motion that she freezes. Her blood turns cold in shock then heats in excitement. She fights to keep her hands steady. From the handwriting alone — she silently thanks herself for deciding to take Ancient Communications as a student, a class widely regarded as absolutely useless — it's obvious this text was not written by an adult. If she had to take a guess, she'd say it belonged to the room's young owner. If it had remained in its hiding place since this home was abandoned, there's a good chance that Screen was the first person to touch this book since it was hidden. She is jittering with excitement. This text isn't a database text. This is big. Not "job well done" big, but career-defining big. History-altering big. This pink book could be the most important discovery of the generation. Such a young hand. Screen can't remember a single ancient text with an author of this age. Were there any? Is this what humans today had been searching for? The missing link between then and now? She gripped the book tight, and practically sprinted out of the house.

Ma Petite Marguerite

「My Little Daisy」

Roopkotha
Chakrabarti



Dear Young Master,

My dear little Marguerite, the jewel of my life,

If this letter reaches you, know that I am no longer of this world. Do not grieve for me, my decision is one I do not regret. In these final moments of my life, I write to you. I write to describe what I have observed in the past hours, what I have done, and what I will leave behind. Everything you need to know.

The feline embers rose higher throughout the marbled limestone mansion, engulfing everything in their path. The velvet carpets and curtains, embroidered with golden threads, surrendered their fabric to the flames below. No one would see the fire's dance as the windows remained shut, forever hidden by the doused wooden frames; the droplets of water only fuelling the flame's appetite. The rotting scent of burning Bois de Violette begun to flood the darkened corridors. The glass chandeliers swaying delicately above gave into the scorching blaze and shattered into a million pieces, each holding onto much more than just a penny's thought.

Every room of the prestigious manor became an illustration of red and orange hues, with embers leaving a sooty trail of ash and smoke. The intrinsic wallpaper of a rather geometric pattern of purple orchids was not spared, either. Each cuboidal petal singed, its past being eaten away by the slow hunger of the flames. Amidst the chaos, there was a certain

eeriness about the mansion. Though filled with riches galore, not a single soul could be seen... unless the wandering souls, lost in a time they no longer belonged to, could be accounted for. Like an oven door awaiting a timer's end, the entrance door was barricaded by a scalding metal bar, banishing those too impatient to enter. Every nook, every crevice, was covered with racks of dampened bedsheets – the flames couldn't escape no matter how hard they tried.

I saw a storm brewing while the sky was still calm. It was a premonition, and I acted accordingly:

I used the old sheets to cover the windows.

I closed the wooden frames, as their clattering was bothersome.

I turned off the lights, to conserve fuel in case we required warmth during the storm.

I barricaded the front door with the metal bar to hold it shut against the winds, which were still calm at that moment.

Your mother, my lady, was rather perplexed as the storm was not yet visible. But I knew it would come, like a moth to a flame.

The corridor stretched into the distance as the embers danced along, their hunger not yet satiated. They lapped at everything in their way, especially the gold-bordered paintings scattered throughout the passage walls. The intricacies of the braided frames were fashioned in a gilded style, adorned with the infamous fleur-de-lis on each corner. The frames held onto some of the most renowned impressionist paintings to have ever been created: Manet, Gauguin, Renoir, Cézanne, Sisley, Toulouse-Lautrec. Objects of gold, silver and brass were neatly placed throughout the mansion, even those made of the purest of marbles and obsidian.



Purple hyacinths laid peacefully atop a windowsill, begging to see the sun. A bunch of pink peonies, the colour of a pale blush, wept to the side, resigning their fate to the fury of the flames begrudgingly. These treasures would never see the light of day, only hear the songs the flames sung as they crept further down the lengthy corridor.

Walking through these halls without hearing your joyful laughter is depressing. My dear Marguerite, when will you return from England? These painted walls, adorned with artworks of our time, if only they truly belonged to you. If only they truly belonged to the family.

If only everything in this golden house had a real owner.

Their stroll finally came to an end as the flames approached the mouth of the grand staircase. The flames reached out, scampering upwards to seize the large family portrait at the top. If one were to run up and save the picture, it would be for naught. The flames had succeeded in the race. The faces were blackened beyond recognition, soot draping over like a black curtain at a funeral, though their opulent garments were visible enough to shed some semblance of those who once stood strong within the mansion.

A father, le maître de maison, stood tall and firm. A deep wine-coloured silken sack coat loosely blanketed his lavender waist, seamless as the times began to change. The man of the house stood, his hands clasped around a handmade ebony walking stick, its shaft made of ivory laced with silver, his white cotton shirt deftly painted against the dark domestic background. Seated beneath him, on a pompous-looking velvet chair, lay le maîtresse de maison, poised and proper. A staple woman of nobility.

Dressed in a mauveine skirt, covered in a black lace bodice that dropped off-the-shoulder en coeur, her bony neckline peeking out. The lady was covered with synthetic dyes. With practised posture, black lace gloves paired with the faint outline of her raven curls, the bonnet barely escaped the wrath of the faceless individual.

The lady had her hands to herself, cradling a young child who had finally earned the right to be breached. The little boy's trousers, a strong floral print matching the family emblem – Une Marguerite Blanche – reached down to his ankle. He wore a white shirt designed as a sailor's suit. Only the child's face remained visible. Illustrated with precision, there was nothing less than the world in his painted eyes, excited and joyous, watching the flames as they ate him and his family up. In the background of the painting lay the elusive, stern nun; the gouvernante of the family. She wore a black habit paired with a deep green apron. She remained in the back, watching over the child, yet even her wrinkled, bony face could not escape the wrath of obscurity amidst the flames.

The staircase in this house is quite imposing. Just yesterday I recalled you could barely climb a step without my help. How I wish to go back.

The family portrait is magnificent, it highlights your smile so well. I don't even need to hold this candle to see your vibrant eyes.

A door opened, by the wind or the spirits, the flames did not care as they drove on. To their delight, they finally reached the master's chambers. A pristine silken print on the curtains and bed alike, what laid in this room were nothing but riches and rare rags. A ceramic teapot lay on the centre of a table beside the window. Two tea plates and a jar of cookies and



sweets surrounded the prized vessel. The tea was still warm, but there was no one left to drink its contents. To the side was a magnificent powder room, decorated with custom objects that most had never heard off. A single teacup, decorated with a yellow hyacinth bordered in gold, laid there half-drunk. A body was slumped, its black curls falling beside the dressing table. Pearls outlined its neck, until the flames took over, starting from the hem of the purple evening gown the mistress loved so dearly.

The flames roared in delight as they drank the lukewarm tea beside her. Following the crumbs beneath, of a biscuit falling from the body's lips, the flames found themselves at the foot of a lovely four-poster bed. Lush were the pillows, soft was the quilt. The master laid asleep atop it all, rigid in eternal sleep. How the pitiful flames would cry at the empty teacup sitting atop the bedside table, a lonesome blue hyacinth bordered with a silver contour etched upon the porcelain. There was a peaceful expression on both faces, oblivious to the raging flames who took advantage of their naivety.

I served tea to the master and mistress, an imported tea with a honeyed taste. Its scent was sweet but also spicy. I used the hyacinth cups today, they are lovely little flowers. I also served them biscuits and sweet cakes, as your mother likes. I hope your parents enjoy the tea with gratitude.

As the flames moved from room to room, corridor to corridor, engulfing everything in their way, they finally reached the front of the glass box hidden at the far end of the hallway. The flames banged against the tempered grains of sand, but to no avail. The glass did not waver – it was a protector, and it would always protect. Within the glass enclosure laid a

stunning painting that could only be second to the grand family portrait if it weren't already considered a masterpiece. An unauthored piece of magic, with strokes that belonged to a different timeline. A war piece of theory. A grim and rustic colour scheme, maroon took over the land and sky alike, a faint dust-like glow in the painted ecru sky.

On the victorious droit ledge was a rally of soldiers shining silver with their shields, heraldry bright and red. The General, clad in chainmail and a proud lavender cape that flowed against the stagnant wind, stood with a tall lance by her side. The details were immaculate, despite merely being a frozen piece of time on a lone parchment. Her hand was in a commanding position, her face hidden beneath the mask as she ordered her men to attack. The chequered pattern on the vamplate that extended well towards the tip of the weaponry stood firm in the ground next to her, awaiting its orders to attack.

Opposing them à la gauche, on the fallen, bleak grounds, laid the corpses in azure robes. Stranded and abandoned, the pale bodies laid defeated. Their bodies were painted in such detail, yet their faces became uncanny voids, obscured by noir splotches seemingly engraved into the canvas. A woman in deep green robes, like a forest of liberty, knelt below. She did not cower in fear, for her hands were clasped in a prayer for protection. To protect the one she cared for the most on this desperate battlefield of red and blue.

The very centre of this haunting image laid a prize that could never be won by either side: A lone white daisy. The brightest and cleanest, a symbol of purity in the now desolate land. The brush strokes were neat, calm, innocent, like a child had come over and delicately added a whimsical piece to the harsh landscape.

Yet, it was the only thing being protected, the only thing being sought.



I once saw a painting in my church. It was a grand spectacle, but now it seems frightening to me.

The title was 'When Greed and Envy seek to possess the same thing, one can only pray for a flower.' Terrifying, isn't it?

But the woman in the green cape ... sometimes I see us, you and your parents, as the violet soldiers. Are we bad people? Dreamers or predators?

My dear Marguerite, do you possess that flower?

Past the forbidden painting, the flames found themselves at a loss. They couldn't move forward, they couldn't push on. There was no path left to engulf. Something was barricading them, but why? What was this painting protecting? What was beyond this far corner of the marbled mansion? What would happen if the flames stopped dancing?

A faint glockenspiel-esque tune haunted from behind the frame. There was something lurking, and the flames needed to move on. They needed to feed on whatever was kept hidden. They needed...

The flames left, scampering to roar against other objects of opulence, other rooms of grandeur. This room could not be touched, it would not be touched.

Beyond the glass enclosure laid a simple room that did not belong. A child's room, a nursery with bright yellow walls, covered with summer flowers. Toys, wooden and woollen, were scattered all over, untouched,

awaiting their master's return from boarding school. A stark difference from the opulence of the mansion, this child's room seemed to belong to a humble beginning.

At the centre of the playful environment, was a wooden box laid out in the open, taunting the flames outside. A porcelain ballerina spun gently as the musical box played a peaceful melody, its notes that of a lullaby. Repeating and repeating, the same melody stuck in the untouched room. It was faint, like the lulling of the ocean against the calming breeze of the night air. Yet, it was as loud as a lion's roar, defending the room against the vivacious flames.

I also visited your nursery. It is so empty without its master. All your toys have scattered since you left.

I will not allow anyone to disturb this room, no matter who. It will remain unchanged. So, please, do not change for me.

The flames returned downstairs, the marvellous staircase barely holding on. They had heard a new noise, something more...vibrant. Broken keys out of tune, an ivory mess of wooden hammers and copper wires – the family piano designed by Érard. A figure in black sat atop the piano stool, her pale fingers moving along the keys as her flattened heels drummed the pedal periodically. The keys played an incoherent, yet tantalising, melody; the harmony equally teasing and taunting the flames to come. It was a broken sound. A perfect sound to call on the flames to come and devour her clad green aprons.

My little Marguerite, I love you, I love you, I love you. I love your eyes, those blue eyes that speak to me as the sea speaks to the moon. I love your short, curly hair, brown like the bark of the tallest tree in the forest.

As I write this letter, we are celebrating the anniversary of your parents' legacy. I would have liked to have had more time with you, it's true. But there are things I must resolve. Take care of yourself, my dear Marguerite.

Live beyond your family name. This family is built on secrets and mystery, stealth and concealment. Do not be overwhelmed by rumours and do not become the monster they create. My dear little Marguerite, you are one of my children, even if we do not share the same blood.

Live for freedom, for equality, for fraternity.

Live for the France you wish to see.

Irène



* * *

Marguerin de Jacinthe was down on his knees as he watched the ashen remains of his family estate. He could still hear the crackle of the flames tearing down his beloved home, all those years ago. No one had told him about the disaster, no one had told him of the loss – the letter had lost its way overseas. He had only left for ten years, a mere schoolboy learning to be a man. Now, he was not only just a man, he was a master. The master of a property that no longer existed.

Devastation was not what he felt, however. The letter in his hand crumpled as a fire, instead, grew in him. Ruled as an accident – he knew it was murder! Jacinthe, from an indecisive boy to a planned man, would do whatever it took to avenge her. He would do whatever it took, no matter what, to make sure the Jacinthe would fade away into eternity and bloom like the iris that he once held so dear.



Step, Breathe.

Chloe Wilkins

The metal railing was cold beneath my calf. I leaned forward, clawing at my left foot as it pointed skyward on the edge of the track.

"Just a little further," you'd said. I clasped the end of my foot with the tops of my fingers, scrunching my nose as I held myself still for a short moment.

The air smelt of rain-soaked pine. Warm breath left icy clouds in the yellow hue of the streetlamp. You'd taken my hand softly in yours and called "let's go," and we laughed and giggled before letting each other go.

You were already one hundred meters in front of me before I started. Full of lively energy, you thundered off around the track, your legs propelling you powerfully forward. I tapped *Begin* on the watch you gave me for Christmas last year and began to pad along the rubber.

Step, breathe,

step, breathe,

step, breathe.

You'd caught up to me now like I knew you always would, and you'd wrapped your arms delicately around my waist scooping me up into the air. "Gotcha," you'd said with your cheeky grin.

"I have to keep going!" I hollered, pretending I wanted you to let me go.

"Okay," you said, beaming, sarcasm slipping from your lips like honey as you lowered me down. I jogged by your side around the track once, twice, three times, listening to the soft hum of cars in the distance.

Step, breathe,

step, breathe,

step, breathe.

My heart rose in my throat and my side ached, but you smiled at me and said, "just keep going," and I ran and ran.

Rhythmic footfalls met the spongey ground. You sped past me, I inhaled deeply. "One more!" You called out.

Step, breathe,

step, breathe,

step, breathe.

Feathering my eyelids open and closed, I moved forward like a sleepwalker lost in a daydream. I curled my fingers into tight fists, dashing along the bouncy rubber.

Step, breathe,

step, breathe,

You stood tall and broad beside the discus nets, your freckled arms outstretched in the dark. I raced into them, and you swallowed me whole with your embrace.

"Hey, Miss," you'd said to me, tucking my head beneath your chin. I closed my eyes, the loud thumping of my chest the only noise in the cold still air. "Just a little while longer," you said to me, but I wasn't sure what you had meant back then.

We sunk down into the freshly trimmed grass that formed a tidy centre within the oval track, and you tilted your head to the side. "Come here," you said. Under the midnight sky, I laid on your blue nylon top moving slowly with its soft rise and fall. You traced the old gums that reached precariously across the clearing from atop Wilinda Hill, one by one with your index finger.

Were you as wise and as old as them?

I like moments like these, I'd said to you. *Wish they could last forever, just you and me.* You smiled at the glittery sky.

You kissed my forehead softly and we lay entwined on the cool damp earth. Time passed quickly then. Dew settled atop my skin like a weighted blanket filled with tiny plastic beads.

You wrote me a note just a little while after. I had found the crumpled piece of paper on the kitchen bench one afternoon, your cursive handwriting scrawled across it.

My Grace

Just a little further. Remember.

*Love always,
Abel.*

I tuck it back inside my pocket and pull the quilt up to my chin. The bed is cold without you by my side. I swallow the lump that rises in my throat, but it doesn't go away, not now, not ever. Salty tears trickle down my cheeks, onto the memory foam pillow where you used to lay.

Breathe.

Where the Stars Shine

Roopkotha Chakrabarti

Twilight approached, the sky was dimming, not a star left to say goodbye.
The wanderer wanders about, searching for what is to come tonight.

The many tales, the many myths, searching for the one:
The infamous face with a magic mouth, a transporter alike.
Where will the wanderer find the storyteller on its hike?

At the dawn of time, when the horizon kisses the sun,
A lone hermit will appear amongst the pellets of sand.
Silent will its footsteps be, a ghost wandering about,
Watching, its eyes ticking and tocking, a clock views the world.
Its voice, a whisper in the wind, waiting to be heard.
It cries, a sandstorm approaches – the unwavering hand.
The hermit remains at a standstill, awaiting the far land.
An immovable object meets an unstoppable force,
The ultimate defence and the absolute offence.
A victor emerges, the hermit moves on, its footsteps rewritten.

Ever observant, the transcendent being emerges behind the dust.
The storyteller makes its way, following the hermit's footsteps.
It walked and walked, as time moved along,
The stars came to say, 'Hello!' for once.
And in its cloak, are papers untold, a new story to unfold.

As the night drawls on, the darkness seeps through,
The wanderer makes haste with a lot to lose.
Picking the pieces, laying the trail,
Tonight will be the night the storyteller will fail.
And all will be as done, like the first flight of a quail.

The glistening sun rises as the birds chirp their morning hymn,
A fellow scholar will awaken, the leaves bowing to the winds.
Deep from its slumber, a will to take on the world like none before.
A child that once provoked the wrath of a tiger – tenacious yet hollow.
A child who once stepped on a dragon's tail enraged yet, full of sorrow.

To make a mark on the world, fight against those who oppose,
The scholar will call upon those most truthful, most trustful.
An aim to find the answer to infinity, the infinite possibilities.

Whereupon the world will never learn its findings,
It will never learn the sacrifices written in the tidings.

Moving past the scales of old, the fur that will remain cold,
The storyteller ponders what will be left to mould.
The stars are bright, twinkling high above the grave,
Of the one who made haste in search of the brave.
But there is nothing to be found, infinity death bound.

It turned midnight, it was not right, it was the middle of a plight.
The wanderer couldn't make sense of any tense,
The scriptures are bleak and bland, unintelligible at hand.
Where was the storyteller?
Was the lens blind?

Even in the deepest of the darkest skies, the unrelenting mind.

In the midst of the heat, the shadows disappear at noon,
Welcoming, or fearing, the arrival of the loon.
A nameless being, yet countless names will belong,
Countless faces of deceit... or is that the nature of truth?
In alleyways and corridors, who in turn is the sleuth?
A jester is to the world as a pebble is to a mountain,
Said the loon, tossing and turning, finding and failing.

A singularity ready to entertain, a minuscule object ready to destroy.

But what does it know of how the world works?

How the world grows?

There is nothing more joyous than seeing things get buried when it snows.

Jeers and leers, shouts and gloats alike, what more is there to see,

To the storyteller's delight?

A being of such disparity, who only ever knew cruelty,

Perfection within the imperfect, the joys it found.

Blinding in this starless sky, a simple cloud so high.

The night rode on and on, slowly but surely,

The wanderer finds light in it all.

The skies were still harrowed by a blanket of obsidian,

But even now, it knows a symphony is sung by the storyteller,

A cacophony that freedom will be sought for.

As the shores recede and tides bellow, heeding the evening's call,

A soldier will wash upon the luminous pores, lodged between wars.

Careful, it will stand.

Careful, it will walk.

Careful, it will fall.

Impatience at its finest, within this dilapidated hall.

Culling away, bruised and battered, it will not move on.

A feral shriek, a herding sound – it will never give up.

The soldier, fate itself will fight to prove it wrong.

A dance with silver, a song of gold and obsidian,

Such tools will be used, will be tainted, to show who will hold

The world in their hands, so callous, so cold.

The barren lands, desolate and calm, past the storms,
The storyteller finds new lands to claim a song.
Papers of silver, writings in gold, is this the fate of everything?
What more could be asked?
What more could be fought for?
Is this all one will ever yearn and be warm for?

With the night passing by, as the warm glow begins to emerge,
The wanderer is wonderstruck. What a bore.
Even in its flight in search for the silver tongue,
The storyteller is nowhere to be found, not a single hum.
Yet the winds carry the embers like a story came undone.

With the ends nearing, the days yearning, the dusk in the clearing,
The reaper shall make its claim to fame, a stake in the flame.
Sheathed beneath the sorrows of the soil,
Within its smog filled hands, it will coil and coil.
A job is yet to be done, yet to forecome.
All is fair in love and war, so they say as darkness emerges.
The reaper knows not, it does not care for what the cause is.
All it does is walk, leaving no stone unturned.
All it does is talk, leaving no blame sojourned.
Wilting away, it will only yearn – is this the day for the learned?

Picking the ashes, shedding away the grit,
The storyteller wonders, was something amiss?
The pages found, collected and sung – is this all that is to be hung?
Time knows not, space knows neither; the storyteller and the wanderer...
Who is who? The chronicle or the conqueror?

Bitter, sweet, and richly poignant

Before the Coffee Gets Cold: A review

Parth Purohit

Toshikazu Kawaguchi's magical realism novel *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* was originally published in Japan before finding its footing in the west. In this world, there is a small cafe (Funiculi Funicula) in an alley in the backstreets of Tokyo, famous for allowing patrons to travel through time to meet a loved one. But there are rules that must be followed and conditions that must be met for this to happen. The book follows a cast of characters who become acquainted with each other because of this coffee shop. The book documents a series of vignettes of the patrons and their experiences travelling through time to have conversations with their loved ones.

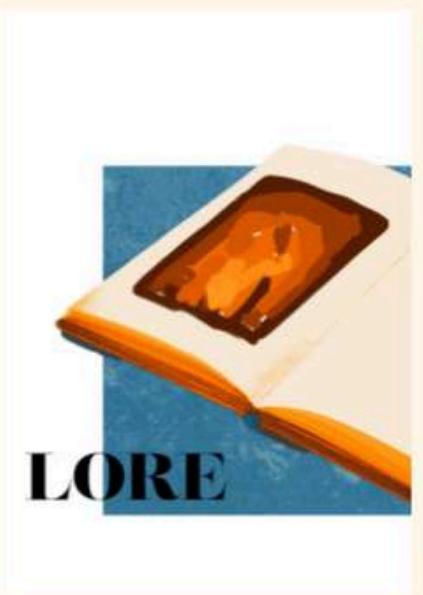
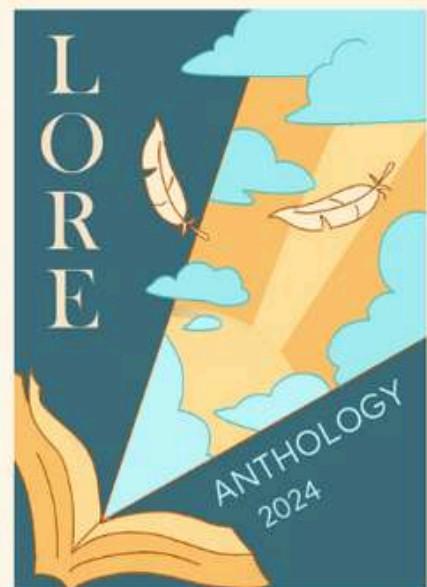
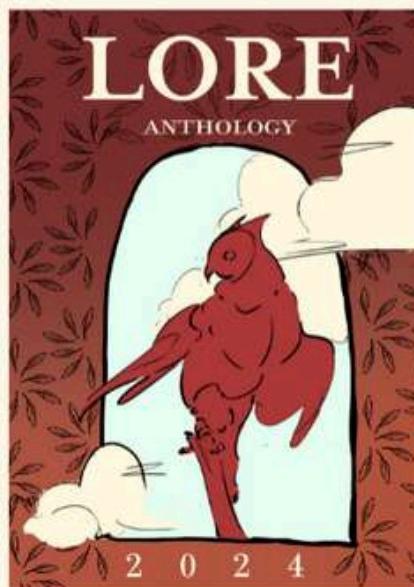
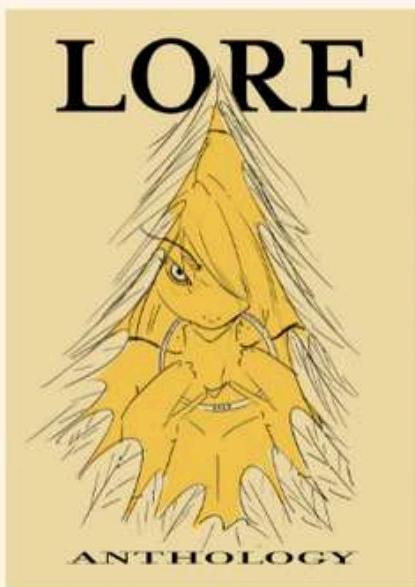
At its core, *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* is an exploration and celebration of love. Characters find themselves in complex and delicate situations where their loved ones are involved. They yearn to meet their kin in different circumstances, divorced from current predicaments, which the cafe allows them to do. Kawaguchi's set-ups are simple, yet heartbreakingly effective. His characters feel both realised and realistic, each vignette told in an intimate manner, as if the reader is in Funiculi Funicula observing two people having a sentimental conversation. Kawaguchi is masterful at building tone and presenting his characters' feelings.

Before the Coffee Gets Cold began as a stage play and was later adapted into novel form. Whilst an interesting novelisation, there are some flaws, which stem from the adaptation of format.

Occasionally, information will be repeated, or something may be described as it would be seen in a play. Sometimes, the writing may also feel a little flat and static, despite the compelling contents of the story taking place. Perhaps some of the intricacies of Kawaguchi's writing may have been lost in translation. While minor, there are still some flaws in the book, relating mainly to writing execution.

Ultimately, *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* is a tale that focuses on the intricacies of relationships, and the bittersweet nature of love. Its excellent usage of tone and dialogue elevates the novel and allows the readers to feel a strong emotional impact. While the writing may not be perfect, readers will surely find themselves drinking this book up and asking for refills for the stories taking place in Funiculi Funicula.

Sidelined Cover Designs



for reading and contributing

Thank you

